Cannon Duke, John Scott, Ian Brooks

World War 1 Memorial Proposal

Memo to congress:

World War I claimed the lives of over 115,000 American soldiers and wounded almost 200,000 others. We as American citizens owe it to the soldiers to give them a proper memorial—they gave their lives to defend this country. This is why it is so important to construct a memorial for this conflict. Also, it doesn’t make sense that World War II gets a memorial and its predecessor doesn’t. World War I is also very significant in US history because it was the first war that involved such a diverse set of countries, and because the US was such a superpower, we impacted the result of the war very heavily. World War I was also a war where many American men between the ages of 18 and 45 were drafted. Out of the 4.8 million Americans who served in the war, 2.8 million of them were drafted—something not commonly seen throughout the history of American wars (with the exceptions of Vietnam). It is especially important to properly remember those young men that died because they were drafted. Also, before American entrance into the war, the Allies were having a rough time against the Axis powers. Once America decided to join forces with the Allies, the tides were turned heavily in favor of the Allies. This war shows just how successful our military program was. Thus, a memorial honoring those who died to give us that status is essential.

The memorial will be set up as a circular trench to signify the type of fighting style Americans had to deal with as soldiers. The memorial will be dug into the earth, just as the trenches were, and will provide a new monumental style of monuments that the US has not seen. Black marble will cover the floors and sides of the trench so visitors may enjoy a beautiful aesthetic experience. There will also be a giant oak tree, elevated above ground level in the middle of the circle, to symbolize patriotism and longevity—patriotism because the oak tree is the national tree, and longevity because oak trees have an average life span of 500-600 years. This will provide for a unique connection of fallen soldier to oak tree, because just as the oak tree will live for a long time, so will the fallen soldiers of WWI. Other materials that will be used are marble models of soldiers. Some of these soldiers will have marble made guns and will be shooting out of the trench to give visitors a sense of what battle was like. In addition to the numerous deaths on the battlefield, many soldiers died due to the intense conditions of the trenches. Because of this, other soldiers will be scattered around the trench, some will even be on the ground wounded to instill a gruesome image to the visitors to show just how rough trench warfare was.

The memorial will also display the significant events from World War I; some of these events include the sinking of the *Lusitania* and the interception of the Zimmerman telegram. The sinking of the Lusitania is so important to include in the memorial because this is what sparked US participation in the war. It is also important to recognize those 128 American folks that were brutally murdered as innocent by standards on a British ship. Displaying the event where the US intercepted the Zimmerman telegram gives a sense of US dominance and is important to show the people that we are far too strong and knowledgeable to allow a German message, with intentions of harming the US, to succeed. The display of these important moments of the war, and the facts related to these events, displayed on plaques, will allow visitors to connect to history, and grasp the important events that took place during World War I.

There is to be extensive visitor interaction within the World War I memorial. To begin, the design of the memorial calls for visitors to walk around the model trench of the memorial. In addition to the walking aspect of the memorial, there will be a few aesthetic parts of the marble that may require interaction. For example, the models of soldiers coming out of the walls and the floor of the trench may require visitors to step around or over certain areas of the memorial.

The new World War I memorial will fit perfectly with other memorials on the National Mall due to the fact that the new memorial shares features and incorporates designs from surrounding memorials. The Vietnam Veterans memorial uses a wall design as the primary artistic display. The trench design of the new World War I memorial will share the wall design, with the trench being comprised of a flat marble floor with two marble walls, guiding visitors through the memorial. Instead of names being incorporated into the wall of the World War I memorial, certain outstanding events of the war will be inscribed into plaques placed on the walls of the trench. The circular design of the World War I memorial comes from the design of the World War II memorial, with the pillars set in a circle. The marble façade of the World War II memorial is another thing in common with the new World War I memorial. Finally, the new World War I memorial’s models of soldiers are shared with the Korean War memorial. It was these models of the Korean War memorial that inspired the idea of soldiers coming out of the walls of the trenches in the new memorial. The idea of the new World War I memorial was simple; to keep the same respectful, almost solemn tone of all of the existing memorials on the National Mall. By following the design and using ideas inspired by the other memorials, the new World War I memorial will fit in seamlessly with the other memorials.

There are indeed a few aspects of the memorial that may be viewed as controversial. The models of the soldiers coming out of the walls and floor of the memorial made be viewed as controversial on two fronts. First, the soldiers will have no distinct features, making the soldier appear to be “insignificant”. This design choice was to honor all of the soldiers involved, rather than sticking to a few facial features of the average American soldier. In addition, these models of soldiers represent all of the soldiers that lost their lives in the war, as inscribing the names of each soldier into the memorial would be labor intensive, and there would need to be much room to fit every name. Second, many of the soldiers’ facial expressions will be of pain and suffering, and the position of some of the soldiers will be coming out of the ground rather than the wall, making the soldier appear dead. The purpose of this design element is to show visitors what it was like to be in war, surrounded by death and pandemonium. With this choice, an emotional reaction would be triggered in visitors and put them in a respectful and reflective mood. The design choices and their significance will hopefully outweigh their controversial nature.